

**TOWN OF NORTHFIELD, VERMONT  
SELECT BOARD REGULAR MEETING  
Minutes of January 9, 2024**

- I. ROLL CALL.** Select Board Chair K. David Maxwell, Board members Charles Morse, Lydia Petty, Merry Shernock, and John Stevens. Also present were Manager Jeff Schulz, Acting Clerk Kenneth McCann, Kaitlyn Keating (Northfield Community Development Network), Robert Weggler, Gerard LaVarnway, Susan Stillinger, Carolyn Stevens, and Elroy Hill.

Chair Maxwell called the meeting top order at 7:00 p.m.

- II. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE.** Those present were asked to join the Select Board members in reciting the Pledge of Allegiance.

- III. SET/ADJUST AGENDA.** Robert Weggler will be added to the agenda under "Public Participation" to express his concerns about sidewalk winter maintenance.

**IV. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (SCHEDULED):**

- a. Kaitlyn Keating, Chair, Northfield Community Development Network (NCDN) update.** Ms. Keating is here tonight as NCDN Chair as well as a member of the Accessibility, Walkability, and Pedestrian Safety Task Force. The NCDN had been working on developing a walking trail that would link the Norwich University (NU) campus with the downtown area by way of Freight Yard Way. As reported by Ms. Keating at an earlier meeting (12/12/23), those plans have been put on hold as NCDN has been unable to finalize a full-access agreement with a Freight Yard Way property owner. As a result, NCDN and the Task Force members are now looking at developing an alternate route for a riverside walk. Ms. Keating said these plans would take advantage of upcoming projects that would remove the Cross Brothers Dam and the replacement of the Main Street Bridge with an all-new structure. Both of these projects include provisions to increase public access to the Dog River near its intersection with North Main Street. There will be every effort to make this trail universally accessible, which she felt should be the standard for all such projects. Ms. Keating said the completion of this trail should provide some economic development benefits, provide new outdoor recreation opportunities, and also enhance the cultural life of the community. Ms. Keating said NCDN was planning to submit a formal request for American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds for the previous walking route but this request is now being revised to reflect the route change.

Board member Morse is in full support of such a project as he feels Northfield has never taken full advantage of the many opportunities provided by its considerable Dog River waterfront. Given the aforementioned construction projects that will impact Dog River access in the downtown area, this would seem to be the perfect timing for creating a riverside walking trail. Board member Morse hopes that NCDN and Task Force members will work with the Vermont Natural Resources Council (VNRC) that is spearheading the dam removal process and also consider pursuing a scoping study that will provide the blueprint for creating a viable community riverside trail that can be enjoyed by all Northfield residents. As regards the scoping study, Ms. Keating said NCDN has remained in contact with the engineers that helped develop the earlier proposed walking route.

Board member Shernock noted local children have always found ways to access the Dog River for swimming. However, she would like a scoping study that would make this experience safer and more accessible to all community members regardless of age, physical condition, etc. She believes that in this particular case funding a scoping study would be a necessary expense as this project should be done right the first time. Board members Stevens and Petty also were very supportive of the proposed riverside walking trail. Board member Stevens would especially like to see, at a minimum, a walking trail from the footbridge to the Main Street Bridge. Chair Maxwell also supports this project as he feels the municipality has underutilized the Dog River waterfront as a community asset. He reminded Ms. Keating of the upcoming federal deadlines for committing ARPA funds (12/31/24) and for their complete expenditure (12/31/26). Ms. Keating then added that the negotiations for the Freight Yard Way trail permission are still ongoing and it may be possible to connect this trail to the new riverfront trail at some point.

- b. Robert Weggler: South Main Street Winter Sidewalk Maintenance.** Mr. Weggler has lived in Northfield for over twenty five (25) years and has lived for the past thirteen (13) years on the east side of South Main Street opposite the South Street intersection. He had previously lived on the other side of South Main Street and on Central Street. He is very disappointed that the Highway Department is no longer clearing the sidewalk on the east side of South Main Street southward of the Prospect Street intersection. This stretch of sidewalk fronts about fifteen (15) houses and he feels this decision creates safety hazards for the residents and for pedestrians in the area. Mr. Weggler noted the west side concrete sidewalk is plowed on a regular basis but crossing this busy thoroughfare to access the snow-cleared sidewalk can be problematic. The vehicular traffic can be quite heavy at certain times of the day. He also noted that the crosswalk at the intersection of South Main Street and Prospect Street has not been lined, which means it is often ignored by motorists. Mr. Weggler felt adding a flashing light at this crosswalk would be a great safety improvement. He said that the Select Board members had acted proactively in placing speed bumps on Central Street to address neighborhood concerns about excessive vehicle speed. Mr. Weggler now hopes the Select Board members will be equally proactive in this matter. He has been told that the reason for this change is that the new sidewalk plow is too wide for this side of the street. Manager Schulz said another reason for not plowing this side of the street is that the sidewalk is in such bad condition that using the snowplow on it would cause further damage. In addition, any broken asphalt sidewalk could damage the machine as well. Manager Schulz noted the previous sidewalk plow had to be replaced early due to damage from crumbling sidewalk. Mr. Weggler agreed that the sidewalk is in bad condition and is sometimes dangerous to walk upon even in the summertime. As for the sidewalk being too narrow for the new snowplow, Mr. Weggler suggested using a push model at such locations. Board member Petty noted that in some parts of this sidewalk the front lawns are now impinging on the sidewalk. In addition, there are utility poles on that side of the street that the snowplow must navigate around. Mr. Weggler said there are only a few utility poles along this section of sidewalk and the snowplow operator should be able to remove the snow around them manually. He then emphasized that the sidewalk does need to be fixed in the near future.

Manager Schulz said a more immediate step would be to improve the safety of the crosswalk at the Prospect Street intersection. Mr. Weggler agreed that this crosswalk is getting much more use since the sidewalk southeast of it is not being plowed. He then thanked the Select Board members for listening to his concerns. He does feel that repairing this stretch of sidewalk and making it all-season safe for pedestrians should be done this year. Chair Maxwell agreed fixing this sidewalk should be a priority in coming months.

## **V. APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

- a. December 7, 2023 (Special Meeting).** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to approve the minutes. Board member Petty found some typos that will be fixed. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**
- b. December 12, 2023 (Regular Meeting).** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to approve the minutes. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**
- c. December 14, 2023 (Special Meeting).** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to approve the minutes. In the discussion of the Northfield Fire Department (NFD) budget, an incorrect word was attributed to Chair Maxwell when he indicated this matter requires considerable deliberation. The correct word was "cogitation." **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

## **VI. APPROVAL OF BILLS**

- a. Approval of Warrant #13-24.** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to approve Warrant #13-24 in the amount of \$505,459.93. It was noted that of the total warrant amount, \$267,043 represented power purchased for the Northfield Electric Department (NED) to be sold later to its customers. Board member Morse noted some payments to repair a damaged utility pole on Water Street. He asked if those expenses would be reimbursed by the responsible party's insurance company. Manager Schulz said that they would. The timing of this reimbursement varies depending on the insurance company. Some pay right away while others try to drag out the process. Board member Stevens asked about some invoices from Symquest regarding the new computer servers they installed. Manager Schulz said some of these invoices are for additional software protection. He does review and receive expert advice regarding whether all this additional protection is really necessary. If the advice he receives says it is not, he will push back on the request. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**
- b. Approval of Biweekly Payroll through December 24, 2023.** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to approve the biweekly payroll in the amount of \$109,293.04. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

## **VII. SELECT BOARD**

- a. Naming of Private Road: Tucker Lane.** Manager Schulz said Northfield E-911 Coordinator Mitch Osiecki was informed by the Vermont Enhanced E-911 Board that a private road located off Fairground Road has never been formally named. It is referred to locally as Tucker Lane. In order to ensure proper emergency response to this location, the E-911 Board has asked that the Select Board members use their authority and formally name this road. Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to formally designate the private road located off Fairground Road as Tucker Lane. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

- b. Zoning Bylaw Update: Schedule Public Hearing.** Manager Schulz said the Planning Commission (PC) has been working for over a year on revisions to the local zoning bylaws. Upon completion of the draft revision, the PC members held a Public Hearing on Wednesday, December 6, 2024 so members of the public could provide feedback on the proposed changes. The document has now been forwarded to the Select Board members so that they can schedule and conduct their own public hearing on the matter. As this hearing must be warned for a minimum of fifteen (15) days, Manager Schulz recommends it be scheduled in conjunction with the first Select Board regular meeting in February 2024, which is Tuesday, February 13, 2024. If substantive changes are made to the document after that hearing, it must be returned to the PC members so they can hold an additional public hearing. Board member Morse said he personally plans to object to some of the revisions contained in the current draft document. His particular concern in the proposed reduction in minimum lot sizes in the low-density areas from the current five (5) acres to two (2) acres. Board member Shernock also opposes this change as she feels it contradicts provisions of the Northfield Town Plan. She would also like to see additional protections provided for the Town Forest, which also would be in better compliance with the Town Plan. Board member Stevens agrees with these concerns. He would like the old standards regarding lot size maintained. Chair Maxwell suggested starting the public hearing at 6:00 p.m. Board member Petty noted that the public hearing the PC members held was not well attended. Chair Maxwell hopes this one will be. He then asked if there is a set deadline to formally adopt the document. Manager Schulz said there is not but added that it should be approved this year so that our zoning bylaws can remain in compliance with state law, etc.
- c. Approval of Vermont Agency of Transportation (VTrans) 2024 Certificate of Highway Mileage.** Manager Schulz said VTrans requires each municipality to confirm whether it added or subtracted any town highway mileage during the previous calendar year. Failure to approve and submit the form can result in delays in receiving state funding for local road operations, etc. Manager Schulz confirmed that there were no changes in local highway mileage in the past year. Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to approve and sign the VTrans Certificate of Highway Mileage. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**
- d. FY 2024-2025 Town Budget Process.** Manager Schulz said he has received the information the Select Board members requested from VTrans and from the Northfield Ambulance Service (NAS). Chair Maxwell said there also needs to be a serious discussion regarding the proper use of ARPA funds to help keep the estimated property tax rate increase at a reasonable amount. *Note: the budget meeting originally scheduled at that time for January 11, 2024 was later postponed until Tuesday, January 16, 2024 at 6:00 p.m.*

#### **VIII. TOWN MANAGER'S REPORT**

- a. Northfield Annual Town Report.** Manager Schulz said the report is now being prepared for delivery to the printer in early February. If the Select Board members have any suggestions regarding the cover photo or dedication page, they should forward them to him as soon as possible.
- b. Main Street Waterline and Cheney Farm Tank Replacement Project.** Manager Schulz said he is working on the wording for the bond article for this project so that the vote can be taken on Town Meeting Day.

- c. **Main Street Bridge Replacement Project.** Manager Schulz said he has been in contact with the engineers for this project. He said updated construction plans should be available for review in about six (6) months. Although some upcoming VTrans projects have been delayed for various reasons, Manager Schulz has been assured this project remains on schedule for 2025.
- d. **Northfield Common Rehabilitation Project.** Manager Schulz reported that DuBois & King has started working on the public outreach phase of this project. Manager Schulz thought it might be a good idea to have two (2) Select Board members work with them on this.
- e. **Northfield Police Department (NPD) Union Contract.** Manager Schulz said the current contract expires on July 1, 2024. He recently was contacted by the bargaining agent that represents NPD union employees so contract negotiations should be starting soon.
- f. **Northfield Falls Pedestrian Safety Improvements.** Manager Schulz has been emphasizing to VTrans the importance of starting this project as soon as possible. The main holdup is that the signed grant agreement has not yet been provided by the State of Vermont. Board member Petty said it took several months to receive the signed agreement for the Vermont Outdoor Recreation Economic Collaborative (VOREC) grant, which resulted in some projects being delayed. Manager Schulz said there is no predicting the time it will take to get a signed grant agreement from the State. Chair Maxwell said if the delay continues much longer, the Select Board members should look at other stopgap funding options to get the project started and completed as soon as possible.

#### **IX. BOARD MEMBERS' COMMENTS, CONCERNS, QUESTIONS**

- a. **North Main Street Sidewalk Repairs.** Board member Stevens thought that cost estimates were being obtained regarding fixing the sidewalks that provide access to Tops Market. Manager Schulz said potential contractors will be in town soon to inspect the site and provide price quotes.
- b. **Brown Public Library (BPL) Automated Doors Status.** Board member Stevens asked about the timeline for installing ADA-compliant access doors at the library. Manager Schulz has been in contact with the door installers and they have said the equipment is now on order. The doors should be installed within the next few weeks.
- c. **Highway Crew Appreciation.** Board member Petty wanted to thank the Northfield Highway crew for putting in considerable overtime hours over the holiday season to address the serious problems on the backroads. Chair Maxwell said he, Board member Petty, and Manager Schulz did a field trip of the backroads last Friday morning (01/05/24). The condition of the backroads, he said, is not the result of any inaction or incompetence on the part of the Highway crew but rather due to the unusual weather patterns this winter. He assured the public that the municipality is doing all it can to get the backroads back in good condition. Chair Maxwell said the Highway crew have been doing good work but still have much to do. He added that residents living on the backroads have been very complimentary regarding the material now being put down. Manager Schulz said the material is from the Brousseau pit and also from the repurposed road material being crushed in our own pit. That material comes from a number of sources. Manager Schulz added that the municipality has been fortunate because some other communities in the area have been running out of road materials as many suppliers shut their pits down in the winter. We now are in good shape but he and Highway Foreman Trent Tucker will remain on the lookout for additional road material for this winter.

**X. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (UNSCHEDULED).**

- a. Elroy Hill: Footbridge Winter Maintenance.** Mr. Hill said he recently spent about forty-five (45) minutes shoveling snow off the footbridge himself. He did have some assistance from a local youth. Manager Schulz said the footbridge is too narrow for the new sidewalk snowplow. He has spoken to Mr. Tucker about having one of the Highway crew shovel this out. Chair Maxwell said if the Highway crew don't have enough time to address this on a regular basis, perhaps we should contract the work out. Board member Morse noted a lot of residents have been advertising their snow removal services on *Front Porch Forum*. Mr. Hill also said he contacted Mr. Tucker recently about having some salt put down on the Common but this wasn't done until the next day. Mr. Hill felt that ensuring the walking safety of our residents, especially our senior citizens, should be a priority for the municipality.

- XI. EXECUTIVE SESSION.** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to go into executive session, in accordance with 1 VSA 313 (a)(1)], in order to discuss a legal matter, contract negotiations, and a personnel matter. Manager Schulz will be present for some but not all of the discussion. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

The Board went into executive session at 8:15 p.m.

Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to come out of executive session. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

The Board came out of executive session at 8:55 p.m. No action was taken.

- XII. ADJOURNMENT.** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to adjourn. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

The Board adjourned at 8:55 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

*Kenneth L. McCann*

Kenneth L. McCann, Acting Clerk

An audio recording of this meeting is available in the Town Manager's Office.

These minutes were approved at the Select Board regular meeting of January 23, 2024.